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U.S. Department of Agriculture
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This is an election year and I know what some of you are expecting. You think I'm going to stand here and brag about all the things the administration has done for Hispanic-Americans in the last three and a half years.

Well, I'm not going to do that. Not only do I think that would be patronizing, but I don't believe in bragging about something until the job is done. And the job isn't done. We've got a long way to go.

But that doesn't mean I'm not pleased of what we have done and what we're trying to do. I am.

I'm pleased, most of all, of what President Carter has done to lock into place those commitments to minority rights and opportunities that were won by his predecessors.

And I'm especially pleased that he's gone beyond simply confirming those commitments.

His administration has tapped the talents and the skills of minority members and put them to effective use, and I point to my friend and colleague, Assistant Secretary Alex Mercure, as an example of what I'm talking about.

Within the past month, for instance, still another major leadership responsibility was given to Alex--this time in fuel alcohol and bio-mass energy development. Congress has assigned this role to the Department of Agriculture and has authorized \$600 million to carry out the program.

Now I said I wasn't going to brag about what we've done, because there's still too much to do. But I can give you a progress report, starting off with what our Farmers Home Administration is accomplishing.

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Excerpts of remarks prepared for delivery by Secretary of Agriculture Bob Bergland before the National Council of La Raza, Albuquerque, N.M., July 25, 1980, at 2:30 p.m. EDT.

This year, for example, we'll be making six times as many farm ownership loans to Hispanics as were made in 1976, along with more farm operating loans.

In the first two quarters of this fiscal year, Farmers Home already has made half again as many farm emergency loans to Hispanics as it made in all of fiscal 1979, and it also topped the 1979 figures for rural housing and rural housing repair loans and grants.

In fiscal 1979, total Farmers Home Administration housing loans and grants to Hispanics were triple what they were in the final year of the last administration.

And I could cite you how many jobs in rural areas were saved or created by Farmers Home business and industrial loans to Hispanic borrowers, and what FmHA community facility loans have meant to all the residents--including Hispanics--of the communities served.

The department has worked very hard to identify segments of disadvantaged communities that needed our help to eliminate a variety of chronic problems. For example, we're particularly proud of having funded the Military Highway Water Corporation which will provide decent drinking water to more than 7,000 households of the colonias of South Texas. Our work with limited resource farmers, particularly with a number of strawberry cooperatives in California, is another source of special pride.

These are just a few examples of how we're targeting efforts to increase benefits to communities of predominant Hispanic background.

Beyond these accomplishments are some others relative to Hispanics that make me proud of the administration I represent.

Take the matter of trade and scientific and technical cooperation between the United States and Mexico, for example. Both are growing to the benefit of each country.

Mexico already is a billion-dollar customer for U.S. farm products, and this fiscal year the figure will reach \$1.6 billion. That's more than double the average of the past five years.

At the same time, the United States is Mexico's largest agricultural customer, buying Mexican coffee, fruits, vegetables and other products worth \$1.2 billion last fiscal year. We expect these imports from Mexico to total \$1.3 billion in the current year, almost 50 percent greater than the 5-year average.

The supply/purchase agreement between the two countries, which was signed last January, is proving beneficial to both, and we're working on a similar agreement for 1981.

Because of the drought, Mexico has purchased much larger quantities of grain, oilseeds and other agricultural commodities than ever before.

Earlier this month, we met with top officials of the U.S. and Mexican railroads to see what could be done to reduce rail congestion at border crossings and to increase the flow of rail cars between Mexico and the U.S.

A team of operating people from the National Railways of Mexico, the U.S. railroads, USDA Inspectors, Customs and Immigration was able to initiate some dramatic improvements in the return of empty cars from Mexico, and I'm pleased to say that many other inspection and documentation problems of a government-to-government nature have recently been resolved.

It has been only because of the fine cooperation of the National Railways of Mexico and the U.S. railroads that we have been able to move as much rail freight between the two countries as we have in the last few months.

Agricultural cooperation between Mexico and the United States goes far beyond trade. For years, with our common border of almost 2,000 miles, we have worked together to control disease and pests of animals and plants, but now joint efforts have been expanded greatly.

Within the past year, we have agreed on an extensive scientific research and exchange program to cover livestock, crops, and agricultural education and training. About 40 joint projects have been developed for work in these areas.

In addition, we plan to establish a U.S.-Mexican working group on agriculture to work not only on cooperation in trade, but also to explore other areas where joint action could be mutually beneficial.

So that's my report. It's not a record of goals achieved, but it is, I think, a record of progress.

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